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Endowment Would Boost Outreach and Scholarships

By KATHERINE MORRIS

If you'd told Naomi Huizar a few years ago she'd end up studying psychology at the University of California, Davis, she probably wouldn't have believed it.

But today, the recent Watsonville High graduate is doing just that, thanks in part to the help and encouragement she received through a series of educational outreach programs now in danger of extinction in the wake of the state's unprecedented budget crisis.

On Wednesday, Huizar, 17, was among a handful of former Wildcatz who attended a press conference in Sacramento in support of a proposed endowment that could create billions of dollars to save outreach efforts, increase scholarships and give more students a shot at going to college.

"I probably wouldn't even be at a UC today if it wasn't for EAOP (Early Academic Outreach Program)," said Huizar, who is the first in her family to attend college. "Not only did it encourage me and show me that I could get into a good school, but it allowed me to tour different campuses, attend SAT workshops and get help filling out applications, writing my personal statements and finding out what financial aid was available."

If created, the California Hope Endowment, sponsored by State Treasurer Phil Angelides, would transform what he called the state's "poorly managed real estate assets" into a \$5 billion endowment for dwindling higher education programs such as EAOP that have been some of the hardest hit by the governor's budget cuts.

It could provide more than \$2 billion for the next 10 years for initiatives to increase college opportunities, making it the seventh largest endowment of its kind in the nation, Angelides said.

"Today, many young Californians face high hurdles in pursuing their college dreams," he said. "It is a powerful challenge for California to open the door wider to more students, but it must be done. The California Hope Endowment is aimed at making the college dream come true for more, not fewer, Californians." Under the proposal, state-owned real estate would be placed in a public trust corporation, the CalHope Trust, and managed like a business to earn returns for the endowment - returns that could reach \$300 million annually after its start up period, Angelides estimated.

Those funds would be used for scholarships, outreach programs such as EAOP and college preparatory programs for high school and middle school students, as well as to help create more challenging courses in secondary schools.

"When I was growing up, the focus was on getting as many students as possible to go to college," Angelides said. "This is the first time in the state's history that I can remember in which policies are

being adopting to reduce that number - namely by raising fees, decreasing financial aid and putting caps on enrollment levels. We're turning away students who should be eligible for admission."

Estimates suggest that annual revenues from the proposed endowment could provide full-fee scholarships to as many as 385,000 community college students or 19,000 California State University students.

Those figures were appealing to recent Watsonville High alumna and UC Davis student Jennifer Gamma, who also spoke at Tuesday's event.

"If this goes through, this endowment could provide enough money for thousands of students to have access to outreach programs that helped me get to where I am today," said Gamma, who hopes to receive a combined degree in psychology and sociology with a minor in political studies.

"I was in outreach programs for seven years, and I probably wouldn't have made it to college without it," Gamma continued. "It helped me with things that my parents just couldn't help me with like applying for financial aid. Who could forget my outreach coordinator, who got out of bed at 11 p.m. to help me with my personal statement?"

Gamma is one of several students in close contact with the state treasurer since the beginning of the year, when news of the cuts first surfaced.

In January, Angelides and renowned Princeton University professor Cornell West rallied support among students at Watsonville High and listened to personal stories such as Gamma's regarding the need to maintain and expand current minority outreach and financial support programs.

The idea behind the endowment is rooted in those students' concerns.

Even though Huizar said she'll never feel the benefits of such an endowment first-hand - she's already begun college - she said she'll continue to campaign for outreach programs such as the ones she participated in for future generations.

"I just want other people to have the same opportunities that I do," Huizar said. "Students need all the help they can get."